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SUBJECT: FRENCH FM KOUCHNER'S JANUARY 1-2 VISIT TO PAKISTAN

REF: A. 07 STATE 170928
[1](#)B. 07 PARIS 00003

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Classified By: Political MC Josiah Rosenblatt for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. As the first high-level Western official to visit Pakistan since Benazir Bhutto's death, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner carried a strong message to President Musharraf that free and fair elections must go forward as soon as possible. While in Pakistan January 1- 2, Kouchner met with President Musharraf, Prime Minister Mohammedmian Soomro and Foreign Minister Inam Ul Haq. To all these officials he stressed France's grief and concern following the killing of Benazir Bhutto. Kouchner also underlined the importance of renewing shared commitment to fighting terrorism and staying the course in Afghanistan. He also advocated keeping democracy in Pakistan on track -- free and fair elections soon, with transparency guaranteed by international monitors. To his interlocutors, he voiced the hope that political prisoners would soon be liberated, and full press freedoms restored. Kouchner also met with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) representatives, including Benazir Bhutto's husband, and with leaders of other political parties. END SUMMARY.

READ-OUT OF KOUCHNER'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN

[1](#)2. (C) Political Minister Counselor and PolOff met with Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner's cabinet advisor on Pakistan, Eva Nguyen Binh on January 4 to get a read-out of Kouchner's January 1-2 trip to Pakistan. Kouchner spoke to Secretary Rice and FM Miliband upon his arrival in Pakistan.

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Nguyen Binh reported that he then also called Slovenian Foreign Minister Rupel to ask if he could speak on behalf of the EU, and clear the substance of his message with Rupel (since Slovenia currently holds the EU presidency). Rupel approved Kouchner's message and his speaking on behalf of the EU. Kouchner, who Nguyen Bihn reported had met Bhutto and saw her as an important political force at an important time even though her political dynasty was marred by controversy, requested that he be allowed to lay a wreath on Bhutto's grave. Pakistani authorities refused Kouchner's request for security reasons -- and because they felt it would set a precedent, allowing all foreign leaders to visit Bhutto's grave. Kouchner laid a wreath at the site of Bhutto's assassination in Rawalpindi. While Kouchner used the visit

to express sympathy over Bhutto's death, he also pushed for elections and a transparent investigation into Bhutto's death in every meeting he attended.

MUSHARRAF AND ELECTIONS

13. (C) During a 45 minute meeting Kouchner pushed Musharraf for as short as possible a delay in the elections. As the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has accepted February 18 date, the issue appears to have been resolved. Musharraf, who was very calm and relaxed during the meeting, told Kouchner that it was the electoral council's decision as to when to hold elections but added that the elections needed to be delayed in order to observe the Muslim month of mourning. Kouchner also stressed that a team of international observers should be allowed to monitor elections. Musharraf said that he welcomes observers. An EU election team of about 60 observers arrived in Pakistan the day that Bhutto was assassinated and will stay in place until elections are held. Nguyen Binh reported that France will beef up this team.

MUSHARRAF AND INVESTIGATION INTO BHUTTO'S DEATH

14. (C) Kouchner urged Musharraf to do everything possible to shed light on the circumstances of Bhutto's assassination, saying it would bring about greater political stability and transparency. Kouchner offered French assistance in an investigation into Bhutto's murder. The Pakistanis have not responded to this offer. Kouchner has publicly stated the unlikelihood of a UN investigation into Bhutto's murder. Nguyen Binh stated that the French agree with the GOP that a UN investigation - slow and slow and bureaucratically cumbersome -- would not be desirable. However, an internationally supported investigation must get underway immediately, and it must have credibility in order to calm rather than exacerbate tensions. Nguyen Bihn reported

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Kouchner expressed interest in a "personality panel" that would be composed of independent, international experts. Nguyen Bihn admitted that an "international investigation" of the kind demanded by the PPP raises difficult questions of legal status and investigative authority in Pakistan.

MUSHARRAF AND AFGHANISTAN

15. (C) Musharraf put the blame for the assassination squarely on the Taliban, citing an intercepted congratulatory phone call from Baitullah Mehsud, a Muslim extremist with links to the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Kouchner brought up the Afghan border region and stressed that France does not want to see the area destabilized. Musharraf responded that Pakistan "wants to cooperate in all areas, but they need to be understood. . . a three way approach is needed to Afghanistan - military, social and economic." Lamenting Pakistan's fate without taking any of the responsibility, Musharraf summed up his view: "the trouble is in Afghanistan, and Pakistan is the victim."

MUSHARRAF AND POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRESS FREEDOM

16. (C) Kouchner also pushed Musharraf to free all political prisoners. He mentioned specifically the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Aitzaz Ahsan. Musharraf responded that a release would stir up political parties. Kouchner also called for a full restoration of freedom of the press.

MEETING WITH PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY

17. (C) In contrast to Musharraf's calm, the PPP officials Kouchner met with blamed the government for not providing security for Bhutto and were harshly critical of its response to the assassination, including its handling of the forensics

and its shifting public statements. PPP officials made clear their belief that Musharraf's entourage, if not Musharraf himself; was likely responsible for the assassination. Nguyen Binh observed PPP members anger, however, does not translate into a call for instability. She reported that party members expressed a desire for partnership and progress as elections move forward.

COMMENT -- THE FRENCH WANT TO KEEP WORKING CLOSELY WITH US ON PAKISTAN

18. (C) The French hope to stay in contact with us on this issue, and Nguyen Binh suggested that Kouchner might call Secretary Rice again early next week to report on his visit

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and discuss the evolving situation, including specifically the investigation of the assassination and the integrity of the election campaign.END COMMENT.

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